

## BE A SAVVY FITNESS SHOPPER

**T**he benefits of exercise are well-researched and well-documented. Unfortunately, that's not always the case with advertising claims for exercise equipment.

Some advertisers claim—without evidence—that their exercise products offer a quick, easy way to shape up, keep fit and lose weight. The truth is, there's no such thing as a no-work, no-sweat way to a healthy, toned body. Deriving the benefits of exercise requires doing the work.

Before you jump into the next home fitness fad, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) offers this advice: Exercise good judgment and carefully evaluate advertising claims for exercise products.

### Evaluating Claims

Read the performance claims critically. Be leery of those that say the equipment or device can:

- Provide easy or effortless results or burn excessive calories. The claims may be true for athletes in top physical condition, but not for most people.
- Help you burn more calories or lose weight faster than other types of equipment. In general, exercise equipment that works the whole body or major parts of it probably helps you burn more calories than devices that work one part of the body. And, the more you use the equipment, the more calories you'll burn.
- Help you "spot reduce"—for example, help you trim your hips or lose the proverbial "spare tire." Toning and losing weight in one particular area of the body requires regular exercise that works the whole body.

Always read the fine print. The advertised results may be based on more than just the use of the machine; they also may be based on restricting calories. The fine print may explain this.

Be skeptical of testimonials or before-and-after pictures from "satisfied" customers. Their experiences may not be typical: Just because one person had success with the equipment doesn't mean you will, too. As for those popular celebrity endorsements, they, too, are no proof that the equipment will work as claimed.

### Finding the Right Equipment

After you've evaluated the advertised claims—but before you make a final purchasing decision—consider these questions:

- Will the equipment help you achieve your desired goal, whether it's to build strength, increase flexibility, improve endurance or enhance your health?



The Federal Trade Commission works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint, or to get free information on any of a variety of consumer topics, call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP, or use the complaint form at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov).

The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

- Will you stick to the program? Before you buy, prove to yourself that you're ready to act on your good intentions.
- To help you choose the best equipment for your needs, check out consumer and fitness magazines that rate exercise equipment. Then test various pieces of equipment at a local gym, recreation center or retailer to find the machine or device that feels comfortable to you.
- Don't be fooled by companies that advertise "three easy payments of" or "only \$49.95 a month." The advertised price may not include shipping and handling fees, sales tax,

and delivery and set-up fees. Ask about all the costs before you close the deal.

- Get details on warranties, guarantees and return policies: A "30-day money-back guarantee" may not sound as good if you're responsible for paying a hefty fee to return a bulky piece of equipment.
- Check out the company's customer and support services. Call the advertised toll-free number to get an idea of how easy it is to reach a company representative and how helpful he or she is.

You may get a great deal on a piece of fitness equipment from a secondhand store, consignment shop, yard sale or the classified ads. Buy wisely: Items bought secondhand usually aren't returnable and don't carry the warranties that new equipment does.

Whether used or new, home exercise equipment can be a great way to shape up—but only if you use it regularly. Don't be taken in by claims of quick, easy and effortless results: There's no such thing as a no-work, no-sweat way to a toned body.

### Additional Resource

Federal Trade Commission, Bureau of Consumer Protection, Office of Consumer and Business Education—Avoiding the Muscle Hustle: Tips for Buying Exercise Equipment: [www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/alerts/muscleart.pdf](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/alerts/muscleart.pdf)

*If you are interested in information on other health and fitness topics, contact: American Council on Exercise, 4851 Paramount Drive, San Diego, CA 92123, 800-825-3636; or, go online at [www.acefitness.org/GetFit](http://www.acefitness.org/GetFit) and access the complete list of ACE Fit Facts™*



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